DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 150 118 SP 012 052

AUTHOR	Deci, Edward L.
TITLE	Some Thoughts on the Matter of Self-Determination and Will.
SPONS AGENCY	National Institutes of Health (DHEW), Bethesda, Md.
PUB DATE	77
GRANT	MH-28600-01
NOTE	18p.; Paper presented to the Psychomotor Learning and Sports Psychology Committee of the Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation Convention (Banff, Alberta, 1977); Presented to Society for Experimental Social Psychology (Austin, Texas, 1977)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Behavioral Sciences; Behavior Theories; *Decision Making; *Individual Power; *Locus of Control; Motivation; Personal Values; Psychology; *Self Concept; *Self Control; Stimulus Behavior

ABSTRACT

"Will" is defined in this paper as the capacity to decide how to behave based on a processing of relevant information. A sequence of motivated behavior begins with informational inputs or stimuli. These come from three sources: the environment, one's physiology, and one's memory. These inputs lead to the formation of motives or awareness of a desirable future state, and motivation leads to subsequent action. Intrinsic motivation is based in the need of the individual to be competent and self-determining. The process of willing or the process of deciding how to behave is energized by intrinsic motivation. The fact of deciding, i.e., of being delf-determining, provides gratification of one's intrinsic needs. Denial of self-determination has serious consequences for the individual's physical and psychological well-being. (JD)

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Paper presented to:

The Psychomotor Learning and Sports Psychology Committee of the Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, 1977 Convention, Banff, Alberta.

Society for Experimental Social Psychology, 1977 Convention, Austin, Texas.

ED150118

Some Thoughts on the Matter of Self-determination and Will

Edward L. Deci

University of Rochester

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Preparation of this paper was facilitated by research grant MH 28600-01 from the National Institute of Mental Health to the author.

Running Head: Self-determination and Will

Edward L. Deci
Department of Psychology
University of Rochester
Rochester, New York 14627

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One of the things which has fascinated me for years, both as an academic psychologist and as a therapist is the matter of will. One hears talk of "having free-will" or of "willing some event". It is a common word in normal conversation, yet it has found relatively little acceptance in the field of psychology -- that discipline which one might expect to be concerned with such matters.

The central question which has been the source of my fascination can be simply stated as "To what extent are people free to direct their own destinies?" For example, "Can one become fully involved in an activity?" or "Can one decide to start working when one feels immobilized by depression?" or "Can one overcome a deprived upbringing to become a successful lawyer?"

The answer to this question was nicely stated by Tompkins (1969) when he said, "Man is neither as free as he feels nor as bound as he fears". We as students of human behavior assume that behavior is ordered and lawful. It is not wholely capricious nor free of constraints. If it were, there would be little use to our study of the principles of behavior. However, I think most psychologists in the last half century have erred by assuming that internal, phenomenonological states such as "will" have no place in the science or practice of psychology. I think it has a crucial place, and I base my conclusion on three types of evidence. First, several empirical investigations have established unequivocally that self-determination has important motivating properties and that the denial of self-determination has serious consequences for one's physical and psychological well-being. I shall discuss some of these studies later in this paper. The second type of evidence is clinical observation. In my work as a therapist

I have repeatedly observed marked changes in people when something happens that I would call "coming into greater contact with their will". The third type of evidence is my own personal experience. I think it is useful to view myself as having the capacity to will. When I keep in mind that in the final analysis I can choose how to behave, no matter what forces -- internal or external -- I happen to be experiencing, then I have much greater flexibility and feel like "I'm in charge of my own universe". The latter two sources of evidence are typically not admissible in scientific psychology; however, for me they are musts. I base my conclusions on the convergence of these three sources of data.

With that in mind, let me tell you what I mean by will. I see it as that marvelous capacity of the human organism to make choices about how to behave. Responses need not follow automatically from stimuli. People can decide how to respond to various stimuli.

Notice that I said "People can decide". I mean to imply that they don't always exercise their will, sometimes they behave like machines, responding automatically to stimuli. These processes have been well documented by the behaviorists; however, the error made by the behaviorists is that they assume that mechanistic responding is all that there is. In fact, people have the capacity for flexibility in their responding, in other words they have the capacity for self-determination rather than being determined by forces "beyond their control".

Sperry (1976) discussed the idea of will be noting that will does not mean freedom from causation, but rather it means having "the kind of control

which allows one to determine one's own actions according to one's wishes, one's own judgment, perspective, cognitive aims, emotional desires, and other mental inclinations" (p. 15).

If one accepts the idea of will as an important causal element in behavior, one must then begin to detail the governing laws of willfulness. The heart of this matter is "expected need satisfaction". People who utilize their capacity to will make decisions about how to behave on the basis of their expectations about what behaviors will lead to valued outcomes. By valued outcomes, I mean internally rewarding consequences, or internal satisfaction. This end state of satisfaction will typically be mediated by external factors such as monetary rewards or the completion of a challenging project. But these external events are not the end states; to understand behavior more fully we must look at the motivating needs and their satisfaction.

Let me, therefore, sketch out briefly my theoretical framework for the study of motivated behavior so I can then discuss the part played by will in human behavior. A sequence of motivated behavior begins with informational inputs, what some people call stimuli. These come from three sources: the environment, one's physiology, and one's memory. For instance, stimuli which may precede eating behavior might be the sights and smells eminating from a bakery (environment), the level of one's blood sugar (physiology), or the memory of a fine meal at the Four Seasons.

These inputs lead to the formation of motives. A motive is the awareness of a desirable future state. One might become aware, for example,

of the possible satisfaction which would follow the ingestion of food.

The third step in the sequence is the decision about what to do. This means planning specific behaviors. This step is often referred to as goal setting. One might decide to go out for a burger and shake, or to cook up an omlette. Or one might decide not to eat because of a previous decision to diet.

These decisions are made in accord with one's expectations about how to achieve the desired satisfaction. One decides to do those things which one expects to lead to the desired satisfaction. But of course we are generally making these decisions in a state of partial uncertainty, so we are usually not sure whether the behaviors will lead to the desired behaviors. Thus, each person makes decisions based on his or her best estimates about what will happen in the future. These expectations are personal, or phenomenological matters. If I want to understand why you decided to do something, I need to approach it from your phenomenological perspective.

The fourth step is the goal directed behavior. Having decided to behave in a certain way, one sets about doing that. This may or may not involve trying to get an extrinsic reward.

Finally, having achieved the goal, satisfaction of the original motive might follow. If one's expectations were correct, the satisfaction will accrue and the sequence will terminate. If not the person goes back to the decision making phase and sets a new behavioral goal, based in part on the new information gained from the recent failure to achieve satisfaction with the prior goal. Having outlined the framework, which appears schematically in Figure 1, let's return to the matter of will.

Recall that I defined will as the capacity to decide how to behave based on a processing of relevant information. Thus, will is apparent in the third step of the framework. It is at that point that one wills behaviors. Also, at that point, the will has another function. It must manage one's motives. Typically people experience many motives at the same time. I'm hungry; I want to finish this manuscript; I'd like to be lying on the beach; and so on. Therefore people decide what to do (i.e., they will) so as to try and satisfy as many motives as possible. But often motives are incompatible in which case the will serves the function of keeping in abeyance those motives which are not satisfyable at that time.

Will and Will-Power. There are several more parts to the story of will, the next of which involves the distinction between will and will-power. Will always operates in conjunction with an organismic need. One wills the satisfaction of hunger by deciding to eat; one wills the satisfaction of the competence need by deciding to undertake a challenging project; and so on. Will-power is a different matter. Will power works in opposition to organismic needs; it is the capacity to force oneself to act against one's organismic needs. One uses will power to abstain from food or sex when food or sex is what one wants but is also what one thinks is inappropriate at that time. May (1969) noted that will power is clearly evident in Victorian moralism and involves self-deceit and rationalizations. People use will-power to suppress an urge when they think they should not want what they want. However, what often happens is that the awareness of the conflict between the "want" and the "should" is so painful that people start deceiving themselves into thinking that they don't want it. Self-

deception has consequences which typically appear as neurotic symptoms.

Self-determination. Those of you who are familiar with my work on intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1975) may recall my assertion that intrinsic motivation is based in the need to be competent and self-determining. As you might guess, will and intrinsic motivation have a lot to do with each other. Will is the capacity to be self-determining and intrinsic motivation is the need to be self-determining. In fact, the process of willing -- the process of deciding how to behave -- is itself energized by intrinsic motivation. The very fact of deciding (i.e., of being self-determining) provides some gratification of one's intrinsic needs.

We know from the Gestalt psychologists such as Lewin (1951) and his colleagues that when people decide what to do they experience a need to carry through with that. People need to complete their Gestalts. So a fuller gratification of one's intrinsic needs comes from both deciding and carrying through with the decision.

Of course, that's not the only function of intrinsic motivation. It also energizes play, exploration, curiosity, and so on. The energization of willing is simply one of the functions of intrinsic motivation.

Willfulness. We've seen now that everyone has the capacity to will and further that everyone has the intrinsic need to will (i.e., to be self-determining). But, does everyone will to the same extent? The answer is quite clearly, NO. Some people have much more control over their own lives than do others. Some people often experience themselves to be controlled by various forces from within and without. Therefore, it is

useful to define the concept willfulness as a personality (or individual difference) variable reflecting the extent to which people utilize their will. People can be more willful or less willful, and the level of one's willfulness is (like other individual difference variables) a function of both heredity and environment.

One's willfulness can also be thought of as one's sense of competence and self-determination. The two concepts are interchangeable. The willfulness might usefully be thought of as a filter through which certain informational inputs either pass freely, are distorted, or are totally blocked. People who are more willful will (1) be more in touch with their basic organismic needs, and (2) will be more free to decide how to behave. So being more willful means having a more open filter so that one is more aware of his or her needs. It also means being more in control of one's behavior. In the schematic representation, I've inserted a filter between inputs and motives to highlight how this works, and I've also emphasized the willing which occurs in the decision making phase.

Later in the paper I will discuss ways in which willfulness is either diminished or enhanced, but first I'd like to point out the consequences of greater or lesser willfulness.

The Loss of Will

When one becomes less willful, one loses awareness of his or her own organismic needs. Concomitantly one often develops substitute needs. Consider the case of eating. We all have a basic organismic need for ingestion of nutrition substances. However, through a variety of mechanisms people develop substitute needs for food which bear only a moderate

relationship to the basic organismic need. For example, when people don't get enough satisfaction of their basic organismic need for love, a substitute need for food may develop, or when their intrinsic need for competence and self-determination is thwarted, they may develop a substitute need for food. In the model of motivated behavior this loss of awareness of organismic needs and development of substitute needs is represented by a closing of the willfulness filter.

The second thing which happens as one's willfulness is diminished is that people give up their behavioral flexibility. The distinction between motives and decision making is lost and one begins behaving more automatically. This automatic, mechanistic behaving is, as I mentioned earlier, what the behaviorists are concerned with. As we lose our sense of willfulness we begin to behave like a set of stimulus-response associations. Informational inputs are distorted by the closed filter and then a motive is formed which leads automatically to some response.

Cognitive evaluation theory. I would like at this point to return to the question of how one's willfulness becomes undermined. Elsewhere (Deci, 1975) I have presented a theory which describes the ways in which extrinsic rewards (or more broadly speaking, situational factors) undermine intrinsic motivation. Let me briefly describe that cognitive evaluation theory and then show how it relates to one's will.

I stated that there are two processes through which one's intrinsic motivation may be affected. The first process I called "a change in perceived locus of causality". When an activity is intrinsically motivated the perceived locus of causality (Heider, 1958) is internal. One does the

activity because of the intrinsic satisfaction which accrues from doing the activity. However, as one does the activity for extrinsic reasons the perceived locus of causality gradually becomes external (deCharms, 1968). The person begins to see the activity as something which he or she does because of external reasons and no longer does it for the simple enjoyment of the activity. This change in perceived locus of causality, of course, leads to decreased intrinsic motivation.

The second process through which intrinsic motivation can be affected is a "change in feelings of competence and self-determination". When people succeed at activities, they feel more competent and self-determining; when they fail they feel less competent and self-determining. Feelings of competence and self-determination are directly tied to intrinsic motivation; enhanced feelings of competence and self-determination means greater intrinsic motivation; diminished feelings of competence and self-determination means less intrinsic motivation.

Every reward -- whether money or praise, citations or candy bars -- has two essential aspects. One aspect I've called a "controlling" aspect since it is the aspect of rewards which brings one's behavior under the control of the reward. The other aspect to every reward is an informational aspect. The presence or absence of a reward and the size of the reward generally convey information to people about their performance at the activity. A monetary bonus implies that someone has performed well on the job. I further suggested that these two aspects of a reward are differentially salient depending on such things as the particular reward, the person being rewarded, and the

circumstances under which the reward is being given. When the controlling aspect of a reward is relatively more salient, it will decrease one's intrinsic motivation by initiating the change in perceived locus of causality process; when the informational aspect is more salient, it will (depending on whether the information is positive or negative) either increase or decrease one's intrinsic motivation by either enhancing or diminishing one's sense of competence and self-determination.

Now if you recall the close link between intrinsic motivation and will you will be able to see how one's willfulness is modified. When one gives up control to external forces one loses some of one's will. And when one has failure experiences which diminish one's sense of self-determination, one is becoming less willful.

Well-being. We've now seen that the loss of willfulness leaves people less motivated and turns them into automatic mechanisms. The picture gets still grimmer. Several recent investigations have revealed that when people are denied the opportunity for self-determination, they may suffer rather serious psychological and physiological consequences. Schulz (1976) reported for instance that institutionalized elderly people who could predict or control the time of visits which young people made to them were significantly better off than those who were visited with the same frequency but had no control over when the visits would be. A matter as small as controlling or predicting the time of visits lead to the people's taking less medication, being rated by observers as being healthier, reporting that they were happier, being more active, and being less lonely and bored.

The importance of self-determination is even more dramatically demonstrated by the so-called nonexplainable deaths. Lefcourt (1973) reported witnessing a case in which a female who had been 10 years mute lived in a hospital ward for hopeless cases. For a brief period while her ward was being redecorated she was moved to a ward for people who were about to be released from the hospital. In a few days she was talking animately after 10 years of not uttering a word. As fate would have it the hopeless ward was finished and she was returned. Within a week this woman, who was in excellent medical health, dropped dead. The return to the hopeless ward was a signal that she had no control. Life no longer seemed worth living. For other such cases, I refer you to Seligman (1975).

The Restoration of Well-Being. From the point of view of intrinsic motivation and willfulness, the restoration of well-being comes from strengthening one's sense of willfulness -- i.e., one's sense of competence and self-determination. This means (1) opening what I've referred to as the willfulness filter, which gradually closed as one lost a sense of willfulness, and (2) strengthening one's capacity to choose among behavioral alternatives; in short, strengthening one's intrinsic motivation and will. Thus, treatment must involve people in a wholistic learning experience which conveys to them that they are effective human beings who do have the capacity to bring about some desired outcomes and that, although there are limitations to their capacities, there is considerable latitude for behaving within these limitations. This learning will be more difficult for people in less responsive or more hostile environments than for people in responsive or benign environments.

To accomplish this end, one might usefully distinguish between outcomes or rewards which have high informational value rather than high control value. Rewards which are controlling will continue to interfere with the development of willfulness; people may learn to respond yet their behavior will be under the control of extrinsic rewards. When it is necessary to use controlling rewards initially, for instance with people who are severely depressed, they should be used as sparingly as possible and then withdrawn as soon as possible. They should be administered to convey positive information about the person's efficacy -- information that the person is worthy and competent and can achieve desired outcomes.

In dealing with people, we as psychologists and other professionals should convey to them that they can be willful and achieve desired outcomes. Since empirical evidence indicates that people who believe they have will behave as if they did (e.g., Steiner, 1970), the belief in one's capacity to choose should strengthen the capacity. The therapist's job would be to align him or herself with the person's will, so as to "take on" the condemning superego, the hostile environment, or the messages of incompetence, whether these are coming from inside the person or from some source in the environment.

The strengthening of one's willfulness should involve both the opening of one's willfulness filter so as to be in contact with more of one's basic motivations and feelings and the strengthening of one's ability to manage these aspects of oneself -- that is, to choose behaviors which satisfy the needs and are also adaptive or effective in the environment. This means that the person will learn to understand stimulus

inputs as sources of information rather than as controllers of his or her behavior. Similarly, the client in treatment will need to move from experiencing the therapist as a kind of controller of behavior (i.e., from who knows what's best and whose comments are interpreted as shoulds) to experiencing the therapist as a source of information to be evaluated openly by the person.

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Figure 1 An organismic model of motivated behavior.